

Bureau of Parks and Lands
Seboomook Unit Management Plan
Work Group Session– Access and Roads
Greenville High School Library
December 6, 2004
6:00 – 9:00 PM

Meeting Notes

Welcome and Introductions – Drew Parkin, Facilitator

Purpose of Meeting: to have a constructive dialogue with the participants about potential solutions to access issues for the Seboomook Unit related to North Maine Woods.

Introductions - Work Group Participants:

State Staff:

Dave Soucy, Director - Bureau of Parks and Lands (BPL)
Kathy Eickenberg – Plan Coordinator for Seboomook Unit Management Plan, BPL
Peter Smith – Western Lands Regional Manager
Tim Hall, Manager - Northern Parks Region
Matt LaRoche – Manager, Penobscot River Corridor
Cindy Bastey – Chief Planner, BPL
Dave Rodrigues – Planner, Off-Road Vehicle Program, BPL

Stakeholder Participants:

Al Cowperthwaite - North Maine Woods (NMW)
Sarah Medina – Seven Islands Company (NMW)
Robert Sawyer V – Dunn Timberlands (NMW)
Kyle Stockwell – The Nature Conservancy (NMW)
Suzanne Auclair – Rockwood
George LaVigne – Greenville
Lou Durgin – Dover Foxcroft
Rick and Jeannine Sylvester – Seboomook Campground
Bruce Marcoux – Seboomook Campground
Dan Legere – Greenville
Paul Fichtner – Penobscot Lake
David Vaughn – Greenville
Bob Guethlen – Rockwood
Jeff Bagley – IF&W Greenville Office
Sandy Neily – Greenville
Alexandra Connover – Guilford

Meeting Ground Rules

The Work Group accepted the proposed meeting ground rules (attached). The Ground Rules state that there will be an effort to achieve consensus on a proposed solution, if possible.

Guiding Principles

Guiding Principles were developed by BPL based on the concerns heard at previous meetings, and its own objectives for management of the Seboomook lands. The Guiding Principles (listed below and provided as a handout for the meeting) were discussed as the criteria against which any proposed solution should be evaluated.

The access management system will:

- Encourage increased recreational use of the Seboomook Unit lands and waters;
- Support responsible use of the Seboomook Unit recreational resources (provide visitors with appropriate information on Maine laws, emergency response, recreational opportunities in lands surrounding the Seboomook Unit – ie. NMW system; sporting camps; etc);
- Provide equity of access to all Maine residents (ie. financially accessible for all income levels, and physically accessible from all geographic areas – ie. does not favor access using the 20-mile road versus the Golden Road);
- Be feasible to operate within the budgetary constraints and options available to the Bureau of Parks and Lands (not to exclude developing new sources of funding);
- Be compatible with access policies for the Penobscot River Corridor;
- Support the continued viability of North Maine Woods in order to support continued public recreational use of private lands in the North Maine Woods system;
- Minimize collateral damage to adjacent landowners (including vandalism or increased liability issues) resulting from any changes to the existing access management system;
- Minimize impacts to sensitive environmental resources on and adjacent to the Seboomook Unit lands;
- Not adversely affect the competitiveness of businesses located within the Seboomook Unit lands (as in-holdings, requiring access through the Seboomook Unit lands);
- Not restrict the full use and enjoyment of private family camps that must be accessed through the Seboomook Unit lands;
- Be efficient and cost-effective, achieving the greatest benefit at the lowest cost.

A suggestion was made to state some of these principles more pro-actively, including effects on businesses and private family camps. Others felt the “do no harm” wording was more neutral. No changes were endorsed by the group as a whole. There was overall agreement to accept these guiding principles.

Scope of Inquiry

The “scope of inquiry” was explained as “the questions we want to answer here.” The following was provided as a handout for the meeting:

The most fundamental issue related to access to the Seboomook Unit is whether or not the State should continue to manage the Seboomook Unit lands within the North Maine Woods system.

Some of the questions to be answered in addressing this fundamental issue are:

- (1) What degree of access control is appropriate/desirable for the Seboomook Unit lands?
 - What purposes does a Seboomook Unit checkpoint serve?
 - security?
 - control of certain types of uses?
 - collection of fees?
 - providing informational and support services to visitors?
 - Is a checkpoint that controls access to the Seboomook Unit lands needed for these purposes or are there other more effective ways to address the functions of a checkpoint to the Seboomook Unit?
- (2) If a checkpoint system is desirable, what are the relative merits of having NMW or the State administer the checkpoint? [*also added at the meeting - What are the relative costs?*]
- (3) What fees are appropriate for visitors to the Seboomook Unit lands?
 - What level of fees would encourage (i.e., not discourage) use of the Seboomook Unit lands by the various user groups?
 - What is an equitable fee structure for the Seboomook Unit lands?
 - What fee structure is fair to camp owners and businesses who must gain access through the Seboomook Unit?
- (4) Given conclusions on checkpoints and fees, if a checkpoint is to be used, should this be managed by NMW or the State? If some other management strategy is adopted what would be the roles of NMW and the State?
- (5) Would removal of these lands from the NMW system have an adverse effect on NMW? How and to what extent? Are there ways to mitigate any adverse effects?

Background - Management of State Lands

(1) Management of Reserved Lands (Pete Smith, Western Region Lands Manager):

- Western Region manages 210,000 acres, including 130 primitive campsites in the Moosehead area, including the Moose River Bow trip, (about 50% water access and 50% drive-to).
- The campsites are first come, first serve, no fee. Revenues from timber sales and leases on the reserved lands pay for the management of these sites.
- The annual cost to maintain these 130 campsites is approximately \$40,000 – that covers two positions, one for 26 weeks and one for 16 weeks (includes salary and expenses).
- The Seboomook Unit adds about 47 campsites at 14 locations (not including 2 additional campsites at Baker Lake).

(2) Management of State Park lands (Tim Hall, Northern Region Parks Manager):

- Parks are generally supported by the General Fund (state revenue account controlled by the Legislature). Fees collected at State Parks are deposited into the General Fund. In 2003 the cost to run State Parks totaled \$6.5 million, while park fees collected from users totaled \$2.5 million.
- The Penobscot River Corridor (PRC) is an exception in that fees and income collected from users of the PRC are deposited in a Forest Recreation account and used, together with funds appropriated from the General Fund, to support operation and maintenance costs for the PRC. In 2003 the total costs for the PRC was \$130,934. of which \$64,129 came from the General Fund, and \$66,805 from individual user fees and income from fees assessed to whitewater rafting companies.
- The PRC includes 70 individual campsites and 10 group sites, most of which are water access only.

(3) BPL perspective on future management of the Seboomook Unit (Dave Soucy, Director of BPL)

- Parks and Lands have traditionally had differing approaches to management of lands and differing sources of funds. However, their management responsibilities for recreation have become increasingly similar; the Seboomook Unit is a good example of a reserved lands parcel where multiple use will be heavily oriented to recreation. This Unit also includes the start of the PRC – so both Parks and Public Reserved Lands staff will have a role in its management.
- Regarding access and recreation management of the Seboomook Unit, the State has a preference for a strategy that either involves North Maine Woods or does not harm the long-term viability of North Maine Woods as manager of adjacent private lands. At the same time, the State recognizes that there are legitimate issues with the current situation that need to be resolved.

- That said, the State is not committed to any one option. Rather, the State is open to a variety of strategies that serve the public interest, including a public/private partnership and a strategy where the State assumes sole responsibility for access and recreation management.
- Regardless of the access strategy that is ultimately selected, the State recognizes the significance of the Seboomook area and is committed to high quality management for this area.
- Financial realities require that if the State assumes responsibility for access and recreation management for this Unit, some level of entrance and/or use fees will likely be necessary to defray at least a portion of the management costs. This is because recreation on reserved lands overall has become more intensive and is requiring more active management than in the past, while the revenue sources are not increasing proportionately.

Range of Access Management Options:

As a framework for the discussion of access management options, Drew Parkin described the bounds of acceptable options based on the BPL's above stated perspective: one the one hand, keeping the status quo is not an option; and on the other hand, if the Seboomook Unit is withdrawn from NMW, it is not likely to be managed like other public reserved lands that have no fees; the objective will be quality management that adheres to the guiding principles, and which will involve some user fees.

Kathy Eickenberg, Plan Coordinator for BPL, presented the following basic options, either of which, she pointed out, could involve a partnership with NMW if that best served the objectives of both. These options were put together as a starting point for the discussion.

OPTION 1: Remain in NMW System with negotiated fees and use restrictions, and enhanced visitor services ("Fix NMW Problems"). Under this broad option, the state would work to secure a fee structure and access management system that would be consistent with the Guiding Principles, and would also work to expand allowable uses on the state owned Seboomook Unit lands (such as horseback riding and bicycle riding). May include a more active partnership with NMW.

1A. Negotiate adjustments to NMW fees – Trial Basis for 20 mile checkpoint.

Objective: to determine if adjustments to the current fee structure would influence the level of use and result in both acceptable levels of use and financial stability.

Means: Negotiate reduced fees, use of per vehicle fees, and other changes to the fee system on a trial basis (for the portion of the NMW system served by the 20 mile gate) for a set number of years. Provide an offset payment to NMW to make up the difference between the revenues received at 20 mile gate in 2004 and revenues received using the trial reduced rates.

1B. Negotiate reduced fees for the Seboomook Unit Lands - Trial Basis.

Objective: To see if it is feasible to implement reduced fees for visitors to the Seboomook Unit Lands within the North Maine Woods system.

Means: Use passes that limit the user to destinations within the State-owned lands in the Seboomook Unit. Set enforceable consequences for violations to these special provisions. Or some other means??

OPTION 2: Remove the Seboomook Unit from North Maine Woods System. NMW 20-mile checkpoint moved to other side of Pittston Farm; Caribou checkpoint moved to Golden Road at intersection of Lobster Trip Road and Golden Road; install a gate at intersections of the Seboomook Dam Road and Golden Road.

2A. Keep the Checkpoint Gate: Manage access with a State operated checkpoint gate at the existing 20-Mile checkpoint location (modified State Park model), and negotiated agreements at NMW Checkpoints.

- Camping fees
- With or without Day Use fees
- Optional Parking Pass program in lieu of day use fees (per vehicle pass for designated parking areas near developed infrastructure -not camping areas- or high use areas.

2B. Eliminate the checkpoint gate.

- Camping passes purchased either offsite or onsite by PRC and/or Lands staff, and Iron-Rangers at remote or water access sites.
- Could include a parking pass system for designated parking areas near developed infrastructure (not camping areas) or high use areas similar to what is being tried on National Forests

Discussion of Options

The group was asked to provide input on the two basic options defined above. The following summarizes the comments and ideas provided:

(1) What would be an acceptable option that involved the Unit remaining in the NMW system?

- Could NMW convert its day use fees to per vehicle fees? Answer: Yes; that would mean approximately a \$12.00/vehicle fee as opposed to \$3.00/person in order to generate the same revenues.
- Is it feasible to have a lower fee set for visitors to the Seboomook Unit, and would NMW consider that? NMW would consider that.
- Would NMW eliminate camping fees for landowners who have RV's on their property? Yes, NMW has already decided to make that change.
- Suggestions were made to charge a day use fee that is related to maintenance costs; for example, charge per vehicle axel; or charge by type of use (different fees for visitors to Pittston Farm or Seboomook Campground; for campsite users; for folks passing through to access their own lands; etc.).

- For campowners, suggested adjustments to the present fee structure included charge the day use fee only for passing through the gate, in and out; have an annual payment and sticker system so that campowners don't have to stop at the gate each time; don't charge at all if access only involves passing over state lands.
- For businesses located behind NMW gates, some wanted same concessions as for private campowners.
- The idea of a family pass was suggested for family members going to visit relatives at a camp or business.
- The issue of whether gate fees are suppressing use was raised. If they are, then there is a problem for all users, not just the campowners and businesses.
- One suggestion for an acceptable solution for staying in NMW included the following:
 - Gatekeepers are trained to be more hospitable and knowledgeable, and come to the cars to greet people.
 - NMW is flexible about allowing some additional uses such as horseback riding and bicycles.
 - Property and business owners are allowed free access to their properties, with passes that allow them to get through the gates without paperwork.

(2) What would be an acceptable option for removing the Unit from NMW?

- The group was polled to see how many could see an acceptable option with a gate retained. There was a majority agreement that this could be an acceptable option.
- The group was also polled to see how many would find some reasonable fees as part of a solution. There was a majority agreement that this could be part of an acceptable option.
- Would NMW consider having an outside organization that would be more service oriented, such as the Chamber of Commerce, operate a gate for both the state and NMW? Answer: Possibly. NMW is open to consider any suggestion.
- Others thought the Chamber of Commerce would not be able or an appropriate party to do this, and it would be better to keep the system simple, not complicate it with more players.
- A vision was presented of a system that kept what is valuable from NMW system, but also added a visitor center in Greenville where visitors could get passes and pay fees, get training and information about using the North Maine Woods or other available lands in the area, find information about local businesses and services, etc.
- Concerns were expressed about the potential costs of having the state operate a gate.
- An option was presented whereby the gate would be moved to some point beyond Pittston Farm, have a new state checkpoint with the state charging its own fee schedule, and install gates where needed to prevent unauthorized entry to NMW system from roads within the Seboomook Unit. This option was seen as a way to address a desire to have a lower fee structure and additional uses for the Seboomook Unit, without NMW having to make a special exception for the Seboomook Unit (viewed as problematic for NMW).

Conclusion

- A majority of participants felt a workable solution might be possible under either of the broad options presented (stay in NMW or get out).
- The group was interested in having the state develop one or more options in detail for further discussion.

Next Steps

- The BPL will develop one or more options in detail and will get feedback from the group through the mail and/or another meeting.